

BROADCAST

Behind the Business: Andrew Chitty

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All3Media's acquisition of Illumina Digital is typical of the trend toward multiplatform consolidation.

After being around for 10 years, Illumina Digital is in the incongruous position of being an old hand in the new media world.

Its managing director, Andrew Chitty, has been at the forefront of combining TV production and interactive media for even longer than that. Before launching Illumina in 1998 he edited the BBC series *The Net* and worked as a creative producer for Granada Education, Channel 4 Schools, Microsoft Network and BBC Science.

A decade on, and with Illumina generating revenue of £4.3m for the year to June, All3Media decided to buy the company for an undisclosed sum making it the super-indie's first non-traditional TV acquisition.

Among the projects that would have attracted All3M is the Interactive Media Award-winning website for Channel 4's *Empire's Children*. C4's Adam Gee commissioned Illumina to build the site for the show, which was made by Wall to Wall. Its chief executive, Alex Graham, describes Illumina as "very creative" and says its acquisition by All3M came as no surprise.

"It makes perfect sense. It's about becoming a media production company rather than just a TV company in the new world we're going into. Illumina has been quite focused on public sector content in the past but presumably All3 sees lots of synergies between it and the other companies in its group."

And almost immediately the ink was dry on the All3M deal, Illumina itself made an acquisition - buying producer V Good Films. The deal is intended to build on Illumina projects such as online BBC teen soap *Wannabes* by moving it into multiplatform drama and new factual areas.

The V Good deal seemed to run contrary to the general industry trend of traditional producers looking to buy into the new media sector, but Illumina hasn't been shy of working with TV indies.

It created a multiplatform joint-venture with Bath-based Touch Productions called Touch Illumina in May this year. Touch chief executive Malcolm Brinkworth began looking for a new media partner about 18 months ago and knew Chitty from their time together on Pact Council. The two companies are well suited, he says.

"There is a great deal of mutual respect and they have the complementary technology skills to complement our storytelling. Illumina, like Touch, is committed to integrity and innovation," Brinkworth says.

Touch Illumina is developing a "groundbreaking" multiplatform project comprising podcasts, TV, radio and online peer groups for the BBC, according to Brinkworth, who has high hopes that Illumina's recent change in ownership will boost the partnership.

"All3Media will bring Illumina strengths such as the composition of its board and its capital base and it won't affect the day-to-day running of the company. That's not All3Media's style and I'm sure Andrew wouldn't have done the deal if that was the case."

It's not as if All3M is new to new media though. North One, Conker Media, Lion and Maverick all have their own digital teams and former C4 new media managing director Andy Taylor has been the super-indie's digital director for just over a year.

But by buying Illumina, All3M has made its intentions clear. Broadcasters, particularly the BBC, have been talking about 360-degree, multiplatform projects for years. With more multiplatform consolidation expected, it is now becoming a commercial reality.